

Featured Writer Interview with Susan Steves by Kate Rurik Write Around  
Portland Workshop Facilitator, September 2013 Newsletter

Susan Steves, 58, experienced six months of homelessness while attending a ten-week, Write Around Portland workshop at the Macdonald Center. Susan is a voracious reader who loves to collect mystery books. Writing in community helped her through several months of living on the streets. No longer homeless, Susan continues to write and plans to volunteer at the Macdonald Center.



**How did you hear about Write Around Portland and what made you decide to take a workshop?**

The day I found the Macdonald Center was the second session of the ten week [Write Around Portland] workshop. I had already been journaling every day about being homeless, and I think [the workshop] helped me keep going. I think it was a good release at the end of the day and I was thrilled. I didn't think they would let me come in and take [the workshop], but I was ushered into the room and that was how I found it. I just walked right in. And it was a miracle.

**Tell us about your experience in the workshop.**

Given my circumstances, it was the bright spot in my week. It was something I looked forward to. It made me feel good about myself. It also was humbling to meet the other participants who had enormous challenges daily for themselves. And yet they showed up for the workshop and their writing was amazing, even if they couldn't hold a pen themselves. It was inspiring.

I think our [volunteer workshop] facilitator made all the difference. She was very gifted. The way she taught, it made it easy to write. It was just a safe haven. Given where I was at in that time of my life, it kept me going.

**How did writing help you overcome the personal challenges you were facing?**

Well, I was homeless and I had never been homeless before. The workshop allowed me to not so much write about what I was going through, but to remember more positive things from my life and to write about things that I enjoy, things that I could possibly enjoy again. I don't drink anymore and [writing] was a positive alternative. It was just such a positive [experience]. We were treated so respectfully during a period of time in my life when I was so ashamed of myself.

**Since you've had connections with some of the people from the workshop, do you feel like you can continue relationships with those people?**

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Oh yeah. Definitely. I think our group had people with medical issues or who were homeless, so it's harder to stay in touch, but definitely because we all wrote about some personal things. We put our feelings on paper and that bond was formed in that little room.

**How did you feel when you stood up and read your piece at the Write Around Portland reading?**

I was nervous because they made me go first. Nervous, but I was very proud of myself.

**How do you plan to use your writing in the future?**

I'm hoping to continue writing. [The workshop] was the first time in my life I remembered to keep a diary or journal and I never have been willing to do it. It's helped me to understand how therapeutic it is. No matter what you do with it, it's good. I need to write about every day because something happens everyday.

**What would you say to encourage someone to join a workshop?**

It isn't about being judged and it isn't about whether you believe you are a good writer, a good speller or anything like that. It is an amazing experience. It isn't like school and it's fun. I believe there is a writer in all of us.